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DOE FOR GPERSON, CHAYLOCK

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DOCUMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS RISING SEA LEVELS,
EROSION

11. (U) Summary: Nigerian film director Desmond Majekodunmi, with funding from the Heinrich Boll Foundation, produced "Global Warming: Nigeria Under Attack", a documentary screened in Lagos on November 19. The 40 minute-long film documents the threat of rising seas levels on recent developments on Victoria Island in Lagos State as well as Bayelsa, Rivers, and Cross River States. Over time, the rising sea level may create millions of refugees and cause millions of dollars of damage to buildings and infrastructure. In the South East, erosion is destroying farm land, buildings, and roads, and state governors are seeking to access federal funds now used to combat desertification in the north. Lagos State says it has taken effective steps to combat the threat of rising sea levels. Some in the Federal Government argue Nigeria must do more. End Summary.

Sea Threatens Major Nigerian Cities

12. (U) Nigerian Director Desmond Majekodunmi, with funding from the Heinrich Boll Foundation, produced "Global Warming: Nigeria Under Attack", a documentary screened in Lagos on November 19. Professor Emmanuel Obot, Executive Director of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, interviewed in the film, predicts that rising sea levels are threatening the entire coastal region, including parts of the Delta cities of Port Harcourt in Rivers State, Warri in Delta State as well as Calabar in Cross River State, and the mega-city of Lagos. Professor Obot believes the flooding of these cities will create tens of millions of ecological refugees. He predicts that heavier rains and higher sea levels could wipe out much of Bayelsa State, having a devastating effect on the oil and gas industry, Nigeria's life blood.

13. (U) In a press interview with ThisDay Newspaper, published November 21, Stefan Cramer, the director of the Heinrich Boll Foundation's Nigeria Office predicted that most of Nigeria's low lying coastal area will be covered with water by 2050, with the remaining sections (Lagos and other coastal cities) being covered by 2100. The exclusive Lekki area, where properties are sold for millions of dollars, is barely two meters above sea level, Cramer said. As a result, these properties are likely to be among the first to be covered by water if sea levels rise by one meter in 50 years as scientists predict, rendering two to three million people in Lagos homeless. Desmond Majekodunmi, the narrator and producer of the film, argues that the rising ocean levels make nonsense of Lagos' recently completed city development plan.

Lagos State Says Adequate Measures Taken

¶4. (U) Responding to the film, Lagos State Commissioner for the Environment, Dr. Muiz Banire, told ThisDay on November 21, that the government is taking significant measures in anticipation of rising sea levels. These include shoreline protection projects, the proposed Eko Atlantic City project, preservation of coastal wetlands, the dredging of existing canals for de-flooding, and the acquisition of emergency de-flooding equipment. In addition, he noted that the state is planting trees, stopping the burning of refuse, developing solar energy, and emphasizing multi-modal transportation, all to combat global warming.

Widespread Erosion Threatens Southeast

¶5. (U) The film focuses on large scale erosion, another effect of climate change that is creating dangerous gullies that swallow farmland, homes, and roads in the states of Nigeria's South East geopolitical zone. Anambra State officials listed over 1,000 erosion sites, the loss of over 2,000 buildings, and the threat of losing another 10,000 structures as new gullies are created and existing ones widen. Imo, Enugu, and other South East states report similar erosion and losses. In addition to the occasional loss of human life, erosion has cause tens of thousands of local residents to leave their farmland. Professor Sabas Asoegwu of the Federal University of Technology in Owerri,

LAGOS 00000142 002 OF 003

Imo State explained that some of the gullies were formed as early as the 1970s, when the diversion of a watercourse during the construction of Nnewi-Okigwe road cause a massive gully to develop; the government did nothing to ameliorate the situation. As a result, the gullies have grown in size, wiping out sections of main highways, Professor Asoegwu says in the film.

SE Governors Ask Federal Funds to Fight Erosion

¶6. (U) State governors in the South East are aware of the problem and want to address it but do not have sufficient funds. Imo State Commissioner for the Environment, Dr. Aloyisius Aguwa told the Guardian Newspaper on November 23 that Imo State alone will need naira 50 billion (about USD 430 million) to address the menace of its 500 erosion sites. Since the state governments cannot single-handedly afford these costs, they are asking to access a federal fund currently used only to fight desertification in the north. The Guardian Newspaper reported that Senator Ayogu Eze, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Information, said the federal government is committed to tackling the problem in the 2009 budget. In the meantime, leaders of the affected states are trying to limit further erosion by regulating the mining of sand and gravel by local residents.

Film Asks Ordinary Nigerians to Change Behaviors

¶7. (U) The 40 minute-long film explains some of the ecological threats Nigeria faces and challenges viewers to change their behaviors to mitigate the effects of global warming. Natural gas flaring is a major cause of green house gas emission in Nigeria as is the burning of firewood for cooking. The movie attempts to change everyday behaviors that also contribute to global warming. These include the use of diesel generators, cars, and the clearing of farmland by bush fires. One fictional scenario portrayed a mother returning home to find her children unconscious from inhaling generator fumes inside the home. A doctor challenges them to decrease generator use, and the government to improve electricity service. The film also encourages individuals to

decrease the use of wood as an energy source while planting trees to both create oxygen and decrease soil erosion. It challenges the government to provide better energy options and coastal management.

Nigerian Officials Outline Way Forward

¶18. (U) A former Federal Permanent Secretary for Petroleum and Special Assistant to the President, Phillip Asiodu argues in the film that Nigeria must develop its alternative energy sources, including wind, solar, and sea wave potential. He expresses concern that as the developing world undergoes industrialization, it will go through a period of pollution before finding a green solution.

¶19. (U) In this film, Minister for Environment, Housing and Urban Development, Halima Tayo Alao (Note: Ms. Alao has since been removed as Nigeria's environment minister. End note), noted that over the past two decades, Nigeria has lost over 75 percent of its natural forest to energy use. She argued that although Africa contributes about three percent of total global carbon emission and Nigeria is within the Kyoto Protocol limits, it must decrease greenhouse gas emissions and control the effects of climate change to prevent increases in poverty throughout the country. Alao said reforestation programs are key to Nigeria mitigating the effects of climate change, and that failure to do so could result in conflicts as Nigeria's 140 million inhabitants are forced into an area one-third its current size.

¶10. (U) Comment: Although there is disagreement about the rate of sea level rise or the extent to which it is caused by climate change, the film which the producer plans to screen on Nigerian television stations and in schools, will help Nigerians understand the potential impact of climate change and the results their individual choices will have in remediating it. End comment.

LAGOS 00000142 003 OF 003

¶11. (U) This cable was written by Consular Officer Erin Sweeney.

¶12. (U) The cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.

BLAIR